

INJURY TO TROTT WEAKENS WYCOMBE AS SAINTS RALLY

by Argus

St. Albans City 2, Wycombe Wanderers 1

WHAT should have been the slaughter of the Isthmian League Saints, traditional outcome of Wycombe-St. Albans games in recent years, became, instead, the number one shock result of the Saturday amateur programme.

St. Albans, run off their feet and bewildered by the first-half efficiency and speed of the Wanderers, looked all set for another giant-sized beating.

But somebody changed the music at half-time. Once the second half began, St. Albans had their supporters gasping with joy as they flung everything into a furious effort which gradually wore down labouring Wycombe.

TRANSFORMATION

There could hardly have been a more staggering transformation or change of fortunes. Why?

Perhaps Wycombe thoughts were dwelling on tomorrow's Hounslow cup-tie. Perhaps it was the leg injury to Cliff Trott, which slowed him to half his usual gallop and drew the sting from the Wanderers' attack. Whatever the reason Wycombe slumped to defeat against a team which matched superior soccer skill with sheer enthusiasm.

The better footballing team unquestionably lost. A miserable one-goal interval lead was an insulting reward for Wycombe's obvious advantage in class and know-how. But the fire and fury of the second-half Saints' revival certainly cancelled out what went before.

DEVASTATING LINK

When the Wanderers were moving well they looked in rare good form. Before his injury, Trott ruled the St. Albans' half of the field and formed a devastating link with Paul Bates, skilfully splitting the home defence with angled passes along the slippery top-surface to an unmarked Dennis Atkins.

With such an inspired service as this Atkins should have made hay against his old club, but his blockbuster shot was curiously missing and he was only fractionally as dangerous as he might have been.

Paul Bates' dribbling had the St. Albans' defence groping in circles. Built on heavyweight wrestler lines, young Darby, the City centre-half, had to play the bull to matador Bates in the first half and was nearly always beaten in the tackle. It was a different story after the interval when Bates, with his fellow forwards, was virtually blotted out of the game.

QUIET FOR DENNIS

Covering splendidly, Wycombe's defence easily shepherded the St. Albans forwards in the first half and Dennis Syrett could have staged a sit-down strike without much embarrassment.

An overhead clearance by John Beck, when pressed by two home players, typified the comparatively nonchalant way in which the Wanderers needed to defend their goal.

It was virtually all Wycombe, and a combination of rank bad luck and failure to send in a fair quota of shots cost a big half-time lead.

UNLUCKY MOMENTS

Unluckiest moments were when Gerald Free's superb power-drive cannoned off goalkeeper Kershaw's chest and when a Bates drive flashed to safety off the crossbar.

Wycombe did everything but score, and it took full back Beck—not for the first time this season—to land a goal. A wolf in a pack of sheep could not have caused more confusion than Beck as he weaved through bunched defenders near the right-hand corner flag.

Over came the pass, pinpointed, and Trott steadied himself on his "gammy" leg before firing home a few minutes before the interval.

The Saints' fighting second-half rally kept the Wanderers very much on the defensive and as wing-halves Weaver and Truett lost their grip on the game, dangerous home centre-forward Grahame Hopkins saw plenty of the ball in the centre.

TERRIFIC SAVE

Brilliant work by Syrett saved Wycombe during the St. Albans siege. He made a terrific flying save from local idol Herbie Smith before Hopkins beat him with a 57th minute header.

Disjointed by Trott's injury, the Wycombe forwards were shadowed and tackled out of the game, but a fit Trott would almost certainly have scored after Atkins had slipped a cunning free kick to him in the home penalty area.

St. Albans kept banging away but defensive slackness gave them the winner. Smith's 80th minute centre should have been booted away, but Greenwood nipped in between three light and dark blue shirts to filch the vital goal.